

**BlackStar Publishing**  
P.O. Box 20948, NY, NY 10009

# **Tenacious**

writings from women in prison



issue 10  
Mother's Day 2006  
\$2

## Call for Submissions

Tenacious is looking for articles, poetry and art from women in prison. We strongly believe that everyone has a story to tell, something to share and are in need of someone who will listen and offer some kind of support and/or understanding. It is important to us that women (in and out of prison) find the power of their voice. We encourage women to share their tales to educate those in society and to empower other women to take a stand for their rights and the rights of others. Use the power of your voice.

### Subjects we are looking for include:

- Prison programs (how they do or don't work)
- Mothers educating their children while incarcerated
- Holding prison officials accountable for their actions or inactions
- Observations and applications on prison life
- Women prisoners uniting to make a difference
- Informing society about prison issues
- Sexual discrimination or sexual preference discrimination in your prison
- Medical breakthroughs or neglect
- HIV, Hepatitis C and other diseases common in prison
- Helping your fellow prisoners
- Literacy and education
- Your job (or lack of a job)

We are compiling stories of women facing time for acting in self-defense against their abusers to publish them in an issue dedicated to domestic violence. Send us your stories! (If you feel that telling your story may jeopardize your appeal, please let us know and we will run it anonymously)

*continued on back cover*

Sorry, we do not publish women's individual cases, charges or court experiences. We also cannot act as liaisons between those in different facilities.

**We are also looking for artwork reflecting women's prison experiences, issues and concerns.**

Send submissions to:

V. Law	OR	Black Star Publishing
PO Box 20388		PO Box 20948
New York, NY 10009		New York, NY 10009

Please note that submissions may be edited for grammar, clarity and length.

Tenacious is free to women in prison.

Men in prison: please send two stamps to cover the cost of postage.

Those not in prison: Your \$2 will support sending free issues to incarcerated women across the United States.

fear engulfed me! I was scared to death and now Charlie wasn't even allowed in.

As the anesthesia took control over me, the last thing I remember is counting down 100, 99, 98, 97... When I awoke with a bikini cut and 18 staples at 9 a.m., everything looked so blurry. I could see Charlie holding our baby in a blanket! I strained to see, but the anesthesia had not worn off yet.

I said, "Is that my baby?"

"Yes," Charlie answered.

And all I could say was "Thank you, God!" and I went back to dreamland.

When I awoke the second time, I was surprised to see my mom holding the baby with Tom and Charlie. They made it! Oh, was I happy! I got to see and hold my beautiful, sweet baby. His father bragged, "He is the biggest baby in the nursery!" Now raising him was another story!

Marianne Brown #420854  
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## My Experience as a Birth Mother

There was a single day I dreaded more than any other. For nine months I sensed it inch its way toward me. I thought that when it arrived, I would will my existence into bursting through with one violent flash. Well, the inevitable came and I was both as unprepared and prepared as I could be. My son "Orion" was born on 1 December 2004 and I had to deal with it.

Today it is all a bittersweet miracle. I was a young, unmarried, incarcerated girl confronting an unplanned pregnancy.

A positive reading of my home pregnancy test confirmed my suspicions on the night before I was arrested. My child's father, "Tonio," who was also my co-defendant and boyfriend at the time, had been taken into custody one week earlier. He was still unaware of our unborn child.

On the way down to the jail, I was informed by detectives that any contact between Tonio and me would result in new charges. Also restricted was "Third Party" contact, which meant that I could not ask my family to tell his family about the pregnancy nor could I contact his family myself. The detectives warned that the only way Tonio would know would be when we appeared together in court. Then he could figure it out for himself after seeing my growing stomach. I was also told there was no chance I would get out in time for birth and that two minutes after he was born, social workers would come to snatch my baby away. I was confused, frustrated and ashamed; any effort I could offer while locked up seemed inefficient at affecting the well being of my first child.

Within the first two weeks of incarceration, I desperately made the first act of parenting to prepare for Orion. Tonio and I exchanged a few letters, not straying from



conversation about our child's future. We had only been successful in briefly skimming over every possible option, including adoption, when true to their word, both Tonio and I received new charges for the violation of the rules. Aware that a harsher sentence would not benefit our son, we stopped trying to write. We made a request to the courts for a supervised meeting to discuss our son, but our attempts were denied.

I resolved that I was basically going to be alone in making decisions. I knew I could still do my best and refused to allow the struggle of being an incarcerated, isolated mother block my hope. Some comfort came from what I felt was Tonio's full support; he had written in one of the letters that whatever was to be decided for our child was up to me.

However, with each new development of my case or any indication I made regarding the growing life I carried, there were tugs and pushes from my family, Tonio's family, other acquaintances, and even inmates. I had moments of insecurity while trying to balance fairness of what I believed to be Tonio's rights with pressures from obligations, expectations and repercussions of having to rely on others for assistance and what was best for Orion. Although I sometimes felt guilty, I remained undeterred from my convictions of needing to do what I knew was right.

Giving Orion up for adoption, which had only begun as a practically dismissed idea, transformed into a clearer possible reality. With my mom's help, I contacted agencies and met with representatives. I wanted to be fully informed and wanted to fairly consider every option of my child's future. Any choice would be an action of mothering that I **did** have control over.

I felt that I needed to share the maturing considerations with Tonio's family, hoping that Tonio would agree. As I

was having such a wonderful time with my parents and I didn't want to go home. But when he arrived he exclaimed "There is a snow storm coming; before it starts we will be on our way, no if's, and's, or but's!" The next day on the road we went, and the snow flakes began to accumulate. Trying to get from New Jersey to Maryland in this snow storm became quite a challenge. It was very scary. We finally got home around 4p.m. Charlie couldn't park our car near the house, because we had a long country driveway that was snowed in. The snow was very deep, so Charlie wanted to walk in front of me to make footprints for me to stop into, but he was too slow. "Out of my way!" I yelled and got to the house quicker on my own.

Around 7p.m. I started getting these sharp, terrible pains. Charlie began to give me his amateur diagnosis of false labor. By 9 p.m. these pains were no joke, but they were not on time, so Charlie went back to bed. By 11 p.m., false or not, Charlie was taking me to the hospital.

Now of course, only emergency vehicles were allowed on the road, so we were stopped by the police. When Charlie told the officer "My wife is having a baby!" We got a police escort all the way into the hospital, flashing lights and all! This pain was so severe, I can't even put it into words; it was worse than any I've ever felt before. I was very anxious for this to be over as soon as it began!

I was dilating, but the baby couldn't drop—my pelvic bones were too small and wouldn't separate all the way, and to top it off, this was a large baby: 8lbs. 9oz! They stuck this scary looking metal pole up the inside of me to break my water. Instantly this warm, soothing river rushed down my legs. I was tired and the pain got so bad, I couldn't even scream. I would hardly breathe. The tears ran down my face and the doctor ran in and saw that the machine was going crazy. Immediately he hollered "C-section!" and I was wheeled away on a stretcher while a nurse told me I was to be prepped for emergency surgery. An overwhelming

constantly, over and over again, pleading and begging, "Please God, let my baby be born healthy and normal."

I was given an injection of Rhogam after the baby's birth to counteract any reactions to the baby's blood leaking into my system, for he had his father's blood type, and for me this could be fatal! Even morning and night sickness seemed easier now that more important things had surfaced. Once I kept a positive attitude, all was well again. It was January already. I was due January 21<sup>st</sup>.

Around this same time, my stepfather, Tom, who had raised me and was very close to me, had a relapse of lung cancer. My mother was a mess, and Tom might die! I needed to be with them both. I spoke to my husband about going home to mom's. I called the doctor. He was very reluctant to let me go, but I was persistent; I was such an emotional wreck being that far away from them at such a crucial time. The doctor finally gave me permission to go, as long as I took my medical records and agreed to check into the closest hospital to my mother's house. The hospital was St. Francis Hospital in Trenton, NJ.

My husband was furious. I lied. I told him I would only stay a few days to ease his anger, and then I went to the train station. In 1979 St. Francis didn't do internal exams on expectant mothers, only external, because of their religious beliefs. After all the paperwork and all the wait, they did nothing but take my vitals, weight me, and measure my huge belly. The nun told me I wasn't due for another month. I debated with the nun; how could my body calculations matching the doctor's calculations both be wrong? She replied, "They just are." I ended up carrying Michael exactly 10 months to the day.

Happily we rejoiced at my stepfather's recovery as he came home from the hospital. I continued to keep telling my husband, "Just a few more days." My due date came and went. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of February, after work, Charlie hit the highway determined to take me back home with him. I

anticipated, I received gentle opposition at first. They said they did not want a bitter battle, but would fight an adoption if that ended up being my decision. I never knew if their wants were the same as Tonio's. Still, a part of me was waiting for the resolution of our case, hoping that guidance would be provided in that.

Nine months passed too quickly for what I was facing. A separation. At 3 am, I went into labor. A panicking young male deputy alerted the jail's medical unit. An ambulance took me down to the city hospital that had become familiar over months of prenatal visits. Of course I was also escorted by another male deputy who would switch shifts with two others. The men stood guard less than two feet away from the hospital bed during the entire delivery.

I was in labor with mild complications until 6:06 pm when I met my son face-to-face. He was beautiful. I was overtaken, recognizing distinguishing features from Tonio and me that had melded into a new being. I even felt I could detect the familiar personality that had been harbored inside of me. He glanced around--skeptical, yet inquisitive, surprisingly alert, blinking with long eyelashes. He would cry briefly whenever nurses retrieved him for the standard observations, tests and evaluations.

Nine pm was the dreaded time. After I fed him his first bottle, my baby was taken to the nursery while I headed to the hospital's secure ward for inmates. I would not be able to touch him again until some far-off, unknown day.

What do I say to my child who was staring at me intently, almost knowingly, waiting to see what I would do?

I wanted to erase the scene or make it unreal. I would have rather died that instant than do what I had to do. I choked out an "I love you," kissed each eye and held his cheek to mine. Then quickly, before I could lose my nerve, handed is tiny frame to the waiting nurse. She backed away slowly,



holding him to face me. It seemed he kept unbroken eye contact the entire time. The fleeting picture I have, which closes "Then" is still of his face disappearing around the corner, his cries starting and fading down the hall.

I wanted to break down, but still felt my grief was undeserved and any consolation unpermitted. I cried silently yet abundantly. Everyone continued to watch with stony looks that communicated that I had earned this. Except for one nurse who comforted me. I asked her to keep Orion company. The vision of him as fragile and utterly alone was the most painful. I felt certain that I had failed him.

Thankfully, contrary to what I had been told by the detectives in the beginning, I was able to arrange for my willing parents to take Orion home. That was one stable reassurance, knowing that he would be in safe, loving surroundings.

I was upset at times, watching my son grown into a happy infant from such a barricaded distance. The jail's counselor would admonish me, scolding me to stop creating a pity-party any time I showed tears. The helpless feeling of not being able to mother Orion from jail was harsher than I had expected. Yet my strength to endure seemed supernatural. Unexpectedly, my parents refused to deal with Tonio and his family. As his mother, I wanted Orion to be raised having a relationship with Tonio's family as well.

I was in the middle of a conflict's crossfire, trying to appease everyone while first and foremost trying to do the best for Orion. Without options for me to assess the situation, Tonio's family's restlessness increased. Unable to see Orion but for one time while Tonio still had not seen him, they felt threatened with rising talk of adoption and fearful that they would be permanently stamped out of his life.

## Special Delivery

Last night as I lay awake, unable to sleep, wondering "what is my son doing on his 24<sup>th</sup> birthday?" At first I was sad, because I couldn't be with him. My heart yearns for him so. I cried out to the Lord to comfort me.

The Lord took me back instantly in time. My despair and sadness were replaced with sudden puzzlement of: What was making my hair fall out? Why was I losing weight? How come I was so tired and moody? Why was I so nauseous in the a.m. hours? Soon it was revealed that I was pregnant at 18 years of age.

When I asked my mom, "What do I do to be a mother, and how do I take care of this baby?" She wasn't any help. She said, "It will just come naturally!" What kind of an answer is that? Disappointed and frightened I learned about motherhood in books. I read, read and read some more. The panic was over, and I began to relax. Now I kind of knew what to expect. I began to preplan things.

Then everyone started telling me I was too young to be a mother and this made my new-found confidence fly right out the window. Then came the fear of how his father would react. Some fathers totally disappear, like mine. What if he goes to work and doesn't come home? How would I support myself and my baby? Where would we live? Despite all of this, I was so happy I was having a baby!

Soon, things weren't easy as I thought they would be. I have a rare blood type that I didn't know about-- A negative. My husband, Charlie, had regular blood- O positive. Our blood did not mix, and this was serious! I didn't find out how serious this situation was until I was 5 months along. Imagine a stomach as big as Mount Rushmore, and now they decide to tell me all this! I prayed

Okay, fast forward to present day. I have been out for one-and-a-half years now and am finally on case-back supervising.

Since I was a drug addict for some twenty-some years, I don't really know where I fit in yet. I do know that I'm done worrying about going back to jail or prison. "The good ole days" are over.

I'm lucky enough to have the support of my mother and my children so I have a roof over my head and all my needs for survival are met. The only part of my transition I still have to complete: I have to learn how to live. Where do I fit in? I am almost fifty years old and I feel that I am so far behind on a career, etc, that I don't even want to get started.

Don't get me wrong. Life is good and I have had opportunities, but I'm just slow to get started.

Good luck to you all! Although there are many people that continue to remain in the system, I have seen success stories.

If anyone would like to write me, I will write back.

Thank you.

Jari Wilson  
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I made the final decision that adoption would be the most loving thing I could do for Orion. Two days later, before I had told anyone my choice, I was served papers for a new case. Though they only knew of the adoption as a possibility, Tonio's family began efforts to prevent its success by challenging me in court. They wanted to take full custody of Orion. I was angry with disbelief that anyone would oppose my capabilities to provide rightly for my son, that anyone doubted that I loved him enough to do the best thing for him, and that anyone would go so far as to steal my rights as a parent.

During the unfolding of the custody case, as an inmate I was not allowed to attend the court dates concerning my son. But I continued with the adoption process, viewing portfolios of prospective parents and families. This was a critical choice as these people would be the most influential to Orion. I ended up solidifying my choice of a couple who had expressed interest in adopting from the first month I was arrested, the woman being a long-time friend of my mother's and also a close companion to me during my toddler years. This decision was undeniably right to me. I felt they would be wonderful providers and compassionate parents and teachers to my son. I cannot forget the feeling of validation of this as I listened to their celebration over the phone when I told them they would be the parents.

When Orion was three months, I was granted an hour-long contact visit with him. I was nervous and anxious to hold him again, to see what he had learned, how he had developed. Four months later, I was surprised to be allowed a second visit with him **and** his mother. This one would be to say good-bye as he was finally able to go home with his parents.

Darkness cleared and everything proved to be turning out better than I could have asked for. Eventually Tonio's

family dropped the custody case. Now there was nothing that could prevent the adoption. I chose an open adoption, which allowed for on-going communication and interaction between Orion, my family and me. Also, his parents advocated my wishes for him to be able to have the same opportunity with Tonio and his family despite the previous turmoil. That was one of my greatest reliefs.

The adoption was formalized on 22 December 2005, shortly after Orion's first birthday. Tonio got to see his son for the first time then as well. He and I are able to keep in touch with Orion and his parents through phone call and mail. We receive visits when they fly out here from their home across the country. The relationship I share with Orion and his parents (even his grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc) is that of an extended loving family.

I still hurt at times, but there is a far higher peace. Choosing adoption was never easy, though what is simple is knowing that I never failed to remain true to my son, always placing his needs above any other. I also know that I will always be his mother, though I will not be raising him. With my decision, I played a fundamental role in parenting him. Nothing I did for Orion can be regretted, denied or erased.

“RJ”  
Incarcerated in Colorado

usually three times a week and the shortest time you can expect to complete them is six to seven months.

I got a good piece of advice from someone who went before me. Don't fight the programs—just do what they tell you you have to do and do it with a smile on your face.

They also expect you to get employment. Trying to find a job that will accept your criminal history is one thing, but add to it three to five days a week at a treatment program and your parole officer appointments which are all scheduled at working hours, usually one to four times a month to start with.

You are immediately aware of the fact that you're not in prison anymore but you are still heavily controlled/monitored by the Department of Corrections.

While still at CCCF, I was allowed to leave the prison five days a week because of my job on the Parks Crew. When I finally got out, however, and drove through my old neighborhoods, I noticed how dirty everything looked: garbage all over the streets and after the pristine clean prison environment, I just thought everything looked filthy.

When you get out, you may get a weird feeling in your stomach. That would be hunger. Since no one has told you it was time to eat, you have forgotten to do so.

For the first month or so there were even times that I missed prison. I missed my bunk in the corner by the bathroom and I missed my friends.



### Transition Piece

I did 18 months at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility for man/del child neglect and animal neglect. The reason for the neglect charges was I had one child living with me part-time and I also had 2 African Grey Congo parrots.

Although I was in prison for "cooking dope," they did not think I met the criteria for the drug/alcohol treatment program.

We all plan for the day we get out. You think your first day out is all yours.

It's time to get released: If your ride or transportation is waiting for you, you will be called. When you get to the office, the atmosphere is immediately different. The same officers that were indifferent to you before are now friendly. You are actually treated like a normal human by corrections staff.

Like I said you usually think your first days out are yours. In my case, I was mistaken.

The first item on my "to do" list was to go immediately to the department of probation and parole and spend a couple of hours getting registered. If you're lucky, you'll find out who your parole officer is so you can start working with someone.

Immediately, a new set of restrictions are put on you: You get a mental health evaluation, do an intake and complete a treatment program, whose classes are

Hello,

A friend of mine gave me y'all address and said that I should send in my poetry. Most of it is written to my son whom I miss very much. I have been in prison six years. I have watched my son grow from the age of seven going on eight at waist high to a strapping young man at age 14, probably at about 5'6" or 5'7". It has been really hard on him, so bad that he did not come to see me until February of this year. He told me, "I did not want you to remember me as that little boy I was when you got locked up but as I am now."

I wept.

This is my last year. I get out April 20, 2006. But it has been the hardest. I write to him so he knows how much I miss him.

Respectfully,  
Jennifer S

(released from the Lane Murray Unit,  
Gatesville, TX, on April 20, 2006)

Justin

When you were born I held you in my arms  
Thanking the lord above for making you  
perfect and strong  
Counting your fingers and your little toes  
I leaned down and kissed your button nose.  
As I looked into your beautiful eyes and  
stroked your downy hair  
I knew in my heart you'd love me and always  
be there.  
As the years passed me by I watched as you  
grew  
Wanting every time to reach out and hold  
you.  
Each letter, picture and card  
I've cherished and locked away in my heart  
Looked over so many times they've become  
thin and worn out  
I know now that there's not a shadow of a  
doubt  
Now that you're older my prayers have come  
true  
Nothing could make this mother more proud  
than I am of you.

Happy birthday.

--Jennifer S

The Eyes of Two Boys

When my days are blue  
when my nights are dark  
the eyes of two boys  
light up my life

When I can't find a way  
when I search for a reason  
when I found myself lost  
in a labyrinth  
the eyes of two boys  
light-up my life

When my days are bright  
when my face has a smile  
when I can see clear sky  
the eyes of two boys  
are in front of mine

When I see my dreams  
come to my hands  
when I see in the future  
a reason to life  
is because I know  
the eyes of two boys  
will be forever mine.

Written by Yraida L. Guanipa  
Reg. No. 44865-004  
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Coleman, FL 33521

(it costs \$8.95 and has activities to strengthen family ties)

Keeping In Touch by Long Distance  
Cornell Cooperative Extension  
1050 W. Genesee St.

Syracuse, NY 13204  
(it costs \$2.50 for a packet of cards that suggest activities for keeping in touch)

My Mother and I are Growing Strong (in English and in Spanish)  
New Seed Press  
1665 Euclid Ave.  
Berkeley, CA 94709

If you do not have the funds to purchase these things, try writing a heartfelt letter requesting information. Explain your situation as an incarcerated mother and what you would like to use the information for. Positive results come to people who try positive things.

Written and Compiled by Rhonda Leland  
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## To My Son

This overwhelming sadness envelops me  
like a shroud,  
As tears slowly slip down my face  
I reach for my towel.  
Missing you so much my heart  
Feeling achy and blue,  
My arms lonely from not being able to  
hold you.  
Turning over and gripping my pillow  
tight,  
My sobs echoing off the walls in the  
stillness of the night.  
Whispering your name and sending a  
silent "I love you" into the night,  
Praying that you feel me and know  
everything's going to be alright.  
I love you my son with all of my heart  
know that I'll be home soon and  
We'll get a fresh start.

--Jennifer S  
(released from the Lane Murray Unit in  
Gatesville, TX, on April 20, 2006)



## Family Day at FCC Coleman

Last Saturday September 10 we have a family day.

Family Day in prison means that our family and friends are allowed inside the compound (dining hall, chapel, recreation and education area) not inside our housing units.

This was the first time that I was going to be able run and sit on the grass with my sons in almost 10 years.

For days I have been searching inside my heart a word to describe my feelings that day; up to this moment I have not been able to find one; it was such a mix feelings, I was joyful, sad, grateful, anxious, guilty, desperate, sorry, thankful, out of control, lost and much much more, all those feelings were traveling in and out of me at the speed of light; a few times thru the day I had to stop and think in order for me to regain posture.

I thought that I was prepared, I had everything under control in my mind; to later find out that I could not articulate with my sons, I cry as I write this because that is really what the prison does for us, detached us from our family and society and left us feeling like we do not fix anymore in society neither in our family but only in prison.

I was adamant to believe that and I always said that that will not happen to me, but it did, however I will survive even if I have to suffer while I learn about my sons.

-Ask your child's caretaker to inform you of any major changes in your child's way of doing things, moods, attitudes etc. Use the same tools that helped you. This way your child will learn from you.

-Set aside a time to write and call your child every week. Try your best to be consistent. Make sure you call and mail your letters on the same day every week, therefore they will have a better chance at arriving the same time every week. It is important to show a child consistence. Your phone calls along with the letters will be your start.

-Talk to your child about his life. If you have trouble thinking of things to say or knowing your child at his current age, check out a parenting book. Mostly listen, share with your children the positive aspects of your life. Are you attending school? A vocational program? How are you working towards meeting your goals? If you are doing nothing or telling them nothing it will be hard to encourage them to do better when they mess up in school or at work.

-When you explain your situation of incarceration (be honest!) take responsibility and don't make excuses. This will give your child a direction to follow. Whatever you do, don't make promises you can't keep.

-Always be loving and supportive even when they make a mistake. Never, never, forget what it was like to be a child. Talk to them about everyday life. It is not their fault they were separated from you. It is your fault. The responsibility to keep in touch belongs to you. The most important job is for you to remain in your child's life and be a positive influence.

## Parenting Resource Information

Family Times, Published by Wisconsin  
Clearinghouse  
P.O. Box 1468  
Madison, WI 53701-1468

number simply place responsibilities toward self, with children out of mind.

I am writing this for the mother who has not realized how important her words and influence are in her child's life. For the mother who sleeps her day away and uses her envelopes to mail home box lists and requests for money, rather than send letters to her children. For the mother who believes she will not be accountable to her child for several years.

The most important accomplishment as an incarcerated mother is to be a positive influence in your child or children's life. Parents forget what it felt like to live in a childlike world full of dangers, real and imaginary. It is easy to forget we ever experienced the fear of being separated from a parent. Can you remember a time as a child where you had to stay with a baby sitter or a family member? Maybe you did not want to be there and felt scared and abandoned. Possibly you thought your parents would come to some kind of harm, maybe they would never pick you up. Have you ever witnessed some frightening or horrifying event outside the range of everyday experience that was not normal in your childhood? Then you know these fears stay with you. This is the same with children of abusive parents. Their feelings of abuse, being ignored, and treated badly are carried into adulthood. If effort is not given to children to solve emotional pains, they will search for what was more important to the parent than them. Therefore, the chance they will repeat your mistakes is very big. I am a parent! I know the importance of parental interaction with your child: Even if you are incarcerated, you can make a difference!

#### Tips:

-Do not shield your child from the truth about your situation. No one can be expected to make good decisions based on false, inaccurate or partly true information. You do not need to be brutal with the truth; just present it slowly, gently, and with compassion. Always use words the child can understand. This takes trial and error, as no parent is perfect.

Even though that I consider myself close to my sons, I realized that I do not know much about them, further I was afraid to ask, maybe afraid to be wrong or said something to prove that I was a mom that do not her sons.

My sons tell me over the phone what they do, however due to the time and financial limitations we do not get into details; for example if they tell me that they play beisbol, that is all what we have time to talk we can not get into details such as what position they play.

This will be too long if I tell you every detail of this memorable time with my sons, but I want to share with you what helped me to relax and allowed me to interact with my sons more easily, it was the fact that I was surprise to find out how much they know about me and how proud they were to let me know that they know a lot about mommie.

When my sons walked in with my family, my sister Briglig (she is my special sister I adore her like if she were my own daughter) said: "You look great, How you lost so much weight?" my little one Jeswil (10 years old) jumped and answered: 'Briglig, mommie practices Yoga" I did not say anything just grap him, give him a hug and kiss him and then I said: "yes Briglig He is right"

Later we were sitting in a circle under a tent and my sister said: "Tell me how is a regular day for you here" my oldest Yrwil (11 years old) jumped and said: "mommie gets up at 5:00 am and do exercise, then she



walks in this track, she is also the choir director and she plays the keyboard so she practices music there at the chapel, she also do legal work there at that legal library ... he was talking like he knew the place and knew every detail of my life inside prison, I did not know what to say, I just hold him tide to my heart and a tear rolled down my face.

When it was time to eat, we were standing in a long line (over 3000 family members plus inmates) we were debating how to make it simple for us, we thought to get the children's trays and we asking them what they want to eat. Jeswil said: " no hamburgers for me, I do not eat hamburgers like my mommie" my brother'n law in a surprise gesture asked: "Jeswil you do not eat hamburgers?" and he answered: " I had never ate a hamburger like mommie, right mommie?" he continue and said: "and the corn and dog I only eat the corn part like mommie" I was just listening trying to learn more about their preferences that were just like my; then Yrwil said (trying to look like mommie too but he is like his father even in his preferences) I had ate just little pieces of hamburgers once and then but I do not like hamburgers either".

My sister was wise enough to let me sit at one table alone with my sons, I asked them to bless the food and after debating between them which one was going to say the blessing. Yrwil begun the blessing by saying: "I thanks God for this time with mommie . . . " my heart and my stomag became a nod of sadness and I could not eat.

### Imprisoned Mothers Still Have a Job; She Must Face Her Children's Questions and Fears with Encouragement and Support

Each day the number of mother's imprisoned in the United States rises. In fact, the large percentage of imprisoned women who are mothers is shocking to most of society. The fact that I find astounding on a daily basis is the amount of mothers incarcerated who do not take responsibility for their current situation, and do little or nothing to help her children through the difficulty of being separated from their mother. It is important for a mother incarcerated (or not) to realize her children's fears and anxieties while playing a positive role in helping them get through this situation.

There are theories that portray the criminal more or less as the helpless pawn or biological, psychological, or social forces beyond his or her reason or control. I am not disputing the fact that social environment along with parental influence and abuse can affect a child's mental state and behavior, leading to criminal behavior. But there are also many more influences that propel a person into criminal behavior; drinking and drug use being the most common.

Therefore, and incarcerated mother could have been portrayed as a helpless pawn up until she was incarcerated! Once she had the cold steel handcuffs placed on her wrists, spent a few sleepless nights in jail to be followed by many more. She then received a front row seat to the reality of loss. The loss of freedom, children, followed by any significant relationship that she may have had. In most cases she will be on her own. The loss of children is not to be taken lightly. Many mothers go months or years without seeing their children when they are incarcerated. This is the most devastating to overcome. The loss of freedom to have meaningful relationships and friendships, the loss of material things, her individuality and social support, these things will all come second to the loss of motherhood. Mostly, she will find that she has come face to face with herself and her mistakes. Usually, with the substance out of the way, she will think more clearly. Hopefully, she will take responsibility for her actions and play a major roll in changing her way of life. This seems like simple reasoning. In many cases, it is not! Only a small percentage of mothers take this road. A larger



13. Encourage child who is playing quietly by herself. Join her to reinforce her positive behavior

14. Avoid toys that are too advanced for your child. Check age recommendations on outside of box

As all parents know, visits to prison can be exciting and stressful. Children may have traveled a long way and be tired, cranky, or hungry when they arrive. Going through security may be frightening for some children. Children may have lots of feelings about seeing their parent in prison. In addition, visiting rooms aren't often warm, friendly, inviting, or child-oriented. It is important for you to keep these things in mind and have reasonable expectations. It is also important for you to think ahead, plan as much of the visit as you can, but be able to adjust your expectations.

-Make plans for reading aloud, play together, or practice active and empathic listening.

-Give your full attention to the child during the visit rather than trying to talk to the caregiver.

-Accept your own feelings and validate the feelings of the child.

MAKE THE VISIT ABOUT YOUR CHILD.

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The rest of the day, Jeswil did not get tired of playing, running, hugging and kissing me, the more that I hug and kiss him the more he wanted. Yrwil wanted a time alone (he is more quiet) and after lunch he walked out of our circle without saying anything and started walking, when he was out of my sight I got up and looked for him and the sweetest moment of the family day came when my son hollered: "mommie"! What a sweet word!. We sat alone and talked for almost an hour.

I honestly can tell you that deep inside my heart I am not sure whether I do or do not agree with Prison Family Day neither I can say whether I am happy or sad after the family day. Maybe your opinion will help. I certainly learned that I did not know how helpless a human being can feel especially a person like me that thinks that I am always in control of my feelings and my thoughts.

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# Mom, I Love You!

## By, Ms. Marianne Brown



You're always there,  
You always care.

You've got the touch,  
that means so much!

Food to cook and floors to mop,  
then you shop until you drop.

Make my bed and press my clothes,  
then you wipe my snotty nose.

Bought me ice cream cones to lick,  
doctored me up when I was sick.

Helped me with my homework scores,  
gave me allowance along with chores.

Baked our bread, cakes and pies,  
when I'd ball you'd wipe my eyes.  
Sheltered me with your loving care,  
there is no other who can compare.

Mom, I Love You!

## Child-Centered Play Techniques for When Your Child Comes to Visit

Have you ever not know that to say or how to play with your child when your child is brought to visit you? Sometimes after weeks, months, or years of not being able to see or talk with your child (because of your incarceration) your interactions with him or her can be affected. The below are a few techniques that may help you out.

1. Follow your child's lead: Join her in how she is playing. Imitate her actions
2. Narrate the child's play: Describe what you see him doing
3. Be willing to play the same things over and over
4. Allow the child to introduce new ideas
5. Cooperate with your child's play ideas as long as they are safe and healthy
6. Take on the roles your child asks you to play
7. Be interested in and appreciate your child's discoveries and creations
8. Ignore tantrums, whining, and negative talk: Turn away or stop playing
9. Join in cheerfully when child begins to play again. Pay attention to the behavior you want in order to see more of it
10. Allow child to struggle with a problem, provide patient assistance, but avoid taking over
11. Avoid grilling with questions
12. Allow and encourage unconventional use of materials. Avoid criticizing and correction child during make believe or exploratory play.